

The Designed Limitation of Human Epistemology and the Necessity of Faith: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

This article argues that the attacks of atheists or philosophers against the Islamic conception of God (i.e., Allah) are constructed on the misunderstood notion of Islamic theology. Because God is already at a station where the standards of reason alone are frivolous if His existence is understood vis-à-vis the claimed teleological essence of His message (Islam). The fundamental approach here is to highlight the doctrinally necessary transcendence of God vis-à-vis human epistemological tools in Islam in the light of its objective (i.e., a test of faith). This article demonstrates the normatively affirmed limitations of reason in logically necessitating the being of Allah under the faith-test dynamic of Islam, which is a necessary component of the purpose of human existence according to the Qur'ān. The article aims to establish the necessity of faith vis-à-vis a designed limitation of the capabilities of the logical arguments for God's existence through three major claims: faith in the unseen, Allah's signs in creation, and the trial of faith, all three being rooted in the Qur'ān. The article also explains the nature of imān in the system of Islamic epistemology, referring to the works of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah and highlighting the incoherent, unreasonable scepticism of atheists in attacking Islamic theism through the principles of reason.

Keywords

faith, signs, unseen, reason, logic, epistemology, atheism, radical scepticism.

Introduction

Since the dawn of Greek philosophy and the interactions of various cultural and religious traditions, theologians and philosophers have argued the conceptions of God through a universally accepted tool, that is, reason. Due to the universal nature of reason, even the arguments for and against the existence of the Creator have mostly been centred around its guidelines. The advocates of theism and atheism have

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therefore dealt with the claims of religion and conceptions of a necessary existence with the assumption that the proof of God's presence depends on deductive premises built around the principles of logic. This approach has several unaddressed problems, including the central assumption of God and religion requiring scientific or new-age philosophical (such as logical positivism) proof to receive any epistemological value.

This article argues that the views of atheists or philosophers of religion against the Islamic conception of God i.e., Allah, have been constructed on a misunderstood notion of Islamic theology according to which God is already at a station where critiques through the standards of reason alone are meaningless if His existence is understood in relation to the claimed teleological essence of His message (Islam/the Qur'ān). The primary purpose of this article is to highlight the normatively necessary transcendence of God in relation to human epistemological tools in Islam in the light of the very objective of Islam i.e., a test. The unjustified assumptions and demands of the atheists regarding God's presence and proof are also an area of interest. An effort has been made to demonstrate the normatively affirmed limitations of reason and how faith (*īmān*) is a necessary component of the purpose of human existence according to the message of the Qur'ān.

This argument has been made through three claims: faith, test, and signs, shedding light on topics like the incoherent scepticism of atheists and the true dynamic of faith, reflective heart, and reason (*īmān-qalb-'aql*) in Islamic metaphysics.

The Claims of Islam

A basic ethic of analysing the statements and claims behind any idea is to judge them on the internal contextual consistency of their justifications. So long as the provided justifications are valid by the standards of widely-accepted metaphysical principles without creating internal incoherence, they cannot be termed rationally invalid. Therefore, intellectual honesty requires one to judge Islam by considering its complete web of claims rather than targeting specific areas of the religion as being "flawed gaps" where religion has an internally coherent and rationally justifiable explanation for its position or lack thereof, acknowledging the true nature of its framework. Thus, the case of the existence of God in Islamic theology can only be discussed considering the claims it affirms about the nature of God and the purpose of His actions. To address the fundamental error in the methodologies of atheists regarding the debate on the existence of God, it is necessary to

outline the precise claims Qur'ān and the Prophet (peace be on him) made about the nature and message of God in Islamic theology.

Any student of Islam can instantly recognize the following themes of the Islamic worldview after a thorough reading of the Qur'ān or the essential Prophetic traditions. These three pillars or claims of Islam are the integral tenets of our major argument.

Faith

The Qur'ānic verse “This is the book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah. Who have Faith in the Unseen”¹ is a prime example of the central tenet of Islamic metaphysics: faith in the unseen (*ghayb*). The Qur'ān, the divine word of God could not be more explicit in expressing the need for faith (*īmān*) in the unseen to gain guidance and travel the path of righteousness. Every time Islamic sources mention piety, success in the afterlife, or correct creedal positions, they do so with the use of *īmān*. The term is rightly called the one-third of the entire religion.

According to the Qur'ānic exegetes, the word *īmān* is “to trust.”² To trust someone or something means to accept the claims or statements made by a certain being without constraining them to back their claims with absolute proof and evidence. Hence, having faith (*īmān*) in someone is to accept or believe their words and assurances with intent and will rather than accepting their word by a logically binding proof they provide. Having absolute logically binding proof for a claim would nullify the need for having faith in it because then an intellectually honest person would be obliged to accept the claim due to obligating evidence.

Additionally, the term for “unseen” in the Qur'ān is *ghayb*. *Ghayb* refers to all realities hidden from us, from Hell and Heaven to the angels and God Himself. The category of *ghayb* consists of all the possible existences and phenomena our bodily senses and observing instruments cannot possibly detect, which gives *ghayb* a wider meaning of “unobservable.” Therefore, the verse “who have faith in the unseen” means “who believe in the realities and beings hidden from them.” The true nature of the claim made by the Qur'ān opens as one wrapped up in the words used in the book, their meanings, and the meanings they develop when strung together with other words. The true nature of the claim made by the Qur'ān opens up as one tries to wrap his/her head around the precise words used in the Book, their individual meanings, and the meanings they develop when strung together with other words.

¹ Qur'ān 2:2-3.

² Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Beirut: Maktabat Dār al-Salām, 2003), 1:110.

In Islamic theology, faith in the unobservable is not a passive matter of one-time decision-making, where once the message of Islamic values is accepted, the intensity of that acceptance stays unaltered. Having faith in Islam is a lifelong process. Faith is to be embraced and held onto by translating it into actions which in turn strengthen the faith. One's trust in the unseen is affected by their actions and obedience to the commands from it. The level or quality of this trust can be decreased or increased by the conviction and consistency through which one tries to sustain their level of trust in God, the unseen, and the Day of Judgement.

Signs

Whether it be the physical makeup of the cosmos or the biological formation of human beings, everything is replete with signs of God. All it requires is a reflective heart/mind to decipher them. The term used for "sign" in the Qur'ān is "*āyah*." The Qur'ān says, "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are Signs for those of understanding"³ and "He shows you, His Signs. So, which of the Signs of Allah do you deny?"⁴ A claim of having signs in our reality that point towards His being has been made in the above verses, signs which have been painted all over our universe by the Creator Himself for the ones seeking Him with a reflective heart and mind.

In Arabic, *āyah* holds two meanings: the first being that of "sign" and the second being "miracle." This duality constitutes *āyah* as the most meticulous term for conveying a message that complements the internal coherence of Islamic claims and objectives. As we are aware, a sign holds a distinct meaning when compared to terms such as "evidence" or "proof." Unlike these other terms, a sign emanates a meaning of suggestion, a hint towards something beyond its own existence. It is an expression that is used for a subtle directing of attention towards an idea/being and not as a full-blown undeniable argument for the idea it represents. The purpose of a sign is to convey a certain meaning suggestively, in a style that separates it from an incontrovertible directive. The Arabic language has many words for conclusive proof and irrefutable reasoning like *dalīl* and *ithbāt*. However, the chosen term holds a very distinct dual nature, hence awarding the choice of the term *āyah* more value than usual. Just as these verses affirm the existence of signs of God all over creation, we learn that these *āyahs* in creation are not merely subtle hints which rationally point towards an unseen

³ Qur'ān 3:190.

⁴ Ibid., 40:81.

Creator/Sustainer in a syllogistic manner, but carry in themselves a potential to send a reflective mind in awe.

Miracles are phenomena which minds find irresolvable with the patterns of nature—a breakage of the natural laws of the universe. Witnessing an apparent glitch or anomaly in the system of reality we are familiar with or how we expect it to behave is enough to trigger a state of serious reflection and at times introspection. According to the Qur’ānic themes, these specific signs of God are not miracles for being traditionally understood glitches in the laws of the universe but are miraculous in the sense of their significance, coherence, and complementary nature to human existence in the context of a grander and more probable potentiality of utter chaos.

In Islam, the universe is covered in signs which are phenomena, experiences, systems, and existences. They, due to their fascinatingly miraculous nature, are complementary “hints” to an unobservable originating and sustaining source.

Deciphering the Signs and Justifiable Trust in the Unseen

Before moving on to the third and final claim in the present discussion, it is important to justify the first two claims in their intra-Islamic context. It has been established through many Qur’ānic verses that the Creator of the universe has placed indicative symbols over intricate varieties of nature which can lead a reflective heart and mind to the hinted source and hence develop a strong faith or trust in the unseen. Now the question is: How can one, according to the Islamic narrative, interact with and interpret these signs of God? What exactly is a reflective heart?

A Reflective Heart

Islamic epistemology derived from its primary source the term *qalb* or heart and placed it at the very centre of its principles related to the matters of faith (*īmān*). Almost every verse that touches on believing or gaining guidance through sincerity mentions *qalb* as the chief organ responsible for the workings of faith. Many Qur’ānic verses unveil a cognitive nature of the heart in Islamic epistemology.⁵ Muslim theologians and metaphysicians have never viewed the heart as merely a piece of flesh responsible for pumping blood throughout the material body of humans. In Islam, *qalb* has a role that has to be understood to grasp the dynamic of faith and God’s signs (*āyahs*).

⁵ Ibid., 2:204; 16:106; 26:89; 40:35; 45:23; 50:37; and 64:11.

According to the twelfth-century Muslim theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE), *qalb* has two meanings. The first is the obvious physical piece of flesh studied under the subject of cardiology, while the second is the spiritual nature of a person. For al-Ghazālī, the *qalb* acts as the locus of human's cognition of God, meaning an internal instrument in humans responsible for recognizing and observing the light of guidance God bestows on them.⁶ The reflective heart includes the concept of an inner eye, which carries functions such as introspection and gaining insights into the true realities of human experiences.⁷

In Islam, guidance is equated with light because light helps one see and understand everything around them. Furthermore, the light of guidance falls straight on the *qalb*. Al-Ghazālī built on this idea with his analogy of “a polished mirror,”⁸ which equates the heart with a mirror that reflects whatever it receives. Likewise, a sincere *qalb* receives the divine light of *īmān* and reflects it by translating it into actions and contemplation; actions in turn enhance the ability of the *qalb* to be able to receive and reflect the light of guidance more accurately. This dynamic is also what improves the ability of the heart to contemplate the signs of God in nature through its boosted sight with the help of the divine light.

All the above makes the heart, the seat of faith in the unseen, the only organ which interacts with the light of guidance and helps reason decipher the signs of God in creation. This is precisely why God punishes the arrogant and ungrateful by sealing their hearts, as hearts are the cognitive tool for spiritual inspection. Once sealed or covered in dust (as a mirror) by committing acts of disobedience, insincerity, and arrogance, hearts lose their connection with reason. This process turns reason into a rogue independent agent never able to see the signs of God or infer the existence of the Creator from them. Prime examples of this situation are those of Abū Jahl and Abū Lahab, the relatives of the Prophet, whose intellectual excellence could not help them understand the message/light of Islam. The cases of these Meccan elders convey the message in quite a vivid manner that the matters of faith are dependent more on a sincere, contemplating *qalb* than a rogue reason and that the heart should be the basis of the faith rather than syllogism, as al-Ghazālī remarks, “If your faith was based merely on some carefully ordered

⁶ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Timothy J. Winter, trans., *al-Ghazālī on Disciplining the Soul* (Cambridge: ITS Publications, 2016), 237.

sylogisms . . . your faith would easily be broken by equally well-ordered arguments, showing how difficulty and doubt would affect such mode of proof for *īmān*.”⁹

The role of the heart as a cognitive instrument installed in human beings for the function of interaction with the light or signs of divine guidance is affirmed all over the Islamic intellectual tradition, from the likes of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE), al-Ghazālī, and Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE)¹⁰ to contemporary thinkers like Syed Naquib al-Attas (b. 1931)¹¹ and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960),¹² all uphold the supremacy and guiding nature of the *qalb* over the functions of reason about deciphering the signs of God. Not only that, but the latest neuroscience studies also support the idea that the heart is linked, at some level, with decision-making and is affected by emotional and psychological states experienced by humans.¹³

Therefore, the Islamic claim of signs of God is in line with the paradigm of intra-Islamic epistemology, putting the job of deciphering the hints of God fully under the authority of the heart, a heart that reflects, contemplates, interprets, guides reason, and goes through the states of faith.

The Innate *Fitrah*

Fitrah is an innate disposition of every human installed in them by the Creator and plays a central role in justifying faith in God. Every human being has some sort of innate clue about the Ultimate Creator, a claim that Ibn Taymiyyah proposed and backed through the Prophetic traditions. The existence of God was a fact worthy of being a basic epistemic fundamental in Ibn Taymiyyah’s understanding. For him, justifying one’s faith through the principles of advanced logic does not add any additional epistemic value to the strength and validity of one’s faith. The knowledge of the existence of the Creator does not require any logical justification, which is a part of the same foundational necessary knowledge of which the knowledge of the existence of the Creator is a part. One assumes some principles of logic to be true due to their self-

⁹ Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *The Deliverer from Error* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1980), 119.

¹⁰ William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2006), 112.

¹¹ Syed Naquib al-Attas, *On Justice* (Kuala Lumpur: Ta’dib Publishers, 2020), 32.

¹² Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness* (Phoenix: Nur Publishers, 2019), 86.

¹³ Dominique Surel, “Thinking from the Heart – Heart Brain Science,” April 22, 2016, <https://noeticsi.com/thinking-from-the-heart-heart-brain-science/#>.

evident nature. However, the existence of God is worthier to be assumed to be true than any such axiom.¹⁴

Emphasizing the validity of the belief in God as a justified epistemic basis due to its self-evident nature, Ibn Taymiyyah does not disregard the worth of signs of God which act as indicators of His existence. He is of the view that the *āyahs* of God in creation carry more of a reemphasizing objective rather than standalone evidence. The inferences from these signs worked as methods to uncloud a *fiṭrah*. Signs serve the purpose of reinstating, re-awakening, and reminding us of an idea that is already available to us in a more vivid epistemic setting (intuition) but was misplaced with time. Just as al-Ghazālī views that only the *qalb* can carry the weight of believing in the unseen, Ibn Taymiyyah considers the intuitive experience of the *fiṭrah* a complete justification to have trust in the intimately evident Creator.¹⁵ It is also important to mention that *fiṭrah* is a dynamic of the *qalb*. Therefore, it can become clouded over time due to disobedience, arrogance, insincerity, and ingratitude, putting the innate understanding of the existence of a Creator as a forgotten and ignored truth.

However, one may ask if the claim of Ibn Taymiyyah holds any weight outside the Islamic tradition. Is faith in an unobservable Creator intrinsically justifiable since it is a divinely-installed idea in the default nature of humans?

Epistemically Legitimate Trust

Olivera Petrovich, an author who has conducted extensive research on the topic of the natural disposition of children, argues that children not exposed to schooling are seven times more likely to believe in a non-anthropomorphic God, making theism a natural and atheism an attained cognitive position.¹⁶ Paul Bloom, another psychologist, argues in support of the findings of Petrovich, stating that the latest findings in cognitive psychology point towards the naturalness of beliefs in a designer in younger children.¹⁷ Likewise, Deborah Kellman, a professor of psychology and brain sciences, investigates the indications of natural

¹⁴ Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm b. Taymiyyah, *al-Radd ‘alā ‘l-Manṭaqiyyīn* (Lahore: Idārat Tarjumān al-Sunnah, 1976), 1:362.

¹⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar’ Ta’arūḍ al-‘Aql wa ‘l-Naql* (Medina: Maktabat Malik Fahd al-Waṭaniyyah, 2005), 8:238.

¹⁶ Olivera Petrovich, “Understanding of the Non-Natural Causality in Children and Adults: A Case against Artificialism,” *Psyche en Geloof* 8, no. 4 (1997): 151-65.

¹⁷ Paul Bloom, “Religion is Natural,” *Developmental Science* 10, no. 1 (2007): 147-51, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7687.2007.00577.x>

theism in younger children. Her findings demonstrate the ability of children to understand natural existences as not being humanly caused and naturally viewing objects in terms of design and purpose.¹⁸ Lastly, the investigations of American experimental psychologist Justin L. Barrett voice the same conclusion, or that “children are born believers of what I call natural religion.”¹⁹

All these examinations of early human cognitive states support the Taymiyyan Islamic model of intuitive theism (i.e., *fitrah*). These findings do not merely justify having faith in a Creator simply because they point to the naturalness of theism, but they also justify having faith because the Islamic claim of humans having an innate disposition of faith in God coincides with the results of these investigations making the claims of Islamic epistemology worthier to be reflected upon. Moreover, since the recent findings in cognitive research frame theism as the default and intuitive position of humans, we can be justified in viewing the belief in God as an epistemic belief that does not necessarily depend on other axioms for its justification.

To this point, the article has shed light on the intuitive and psychological nature of having faith in an unseen Creator and explained whether this belief is a justified position to hold simply due to its subjectively claimed self-evident nature. It has also elaborated on the role that an objective tool like reason can play regarding the validity of faith and how it is misused by incoherently radical scepticism.

Reasonable Faith and Radical Scepticism

Although the primacy of belief lies in the spiritual receptors of *qalb*, faith never runs contrary to the laws of logic nor does belief in an unseen Creator contradict the laws of reality. This idea can easily be recognized in the Qur’ān, wherein Allah repeatedly argues with the opponents of Islam through rationality.²⁰ He asks them to bring their proof, exposes the contradictions of their claims, and targets the irrationality of their doctrinal systems.²¹ Due to this normative approach to Islam, Muslim theologians considered faith without rational backing blameworthy and

¹⁸ Deborah Kelemen, “Are Children “Intuitive Theists”?” Reasoning about Purpose and Design in Nature,” *Psychological Science* 15, no. 5 (2004): 295-301, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0956-7976.2004.00672.x>.

¹⁹ Justin L. Barrett, *Born Believers: The Science of Children’s Religious Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 35-36.

²⁰ Qur’ān 21:22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21:24.

in some instances even insufficient.²² Thus, proposing the tolerance of utterly illogical faith under Islamic theology amounts to a strawman fallacy.

Muslims hold Allah to be the Creator, Designer, Sustainer and Master of everything that exists, operating under the abstract principles of logic. To think of a reality that violates the primary laws of logic, such as the law of the excluded middle or the law of contradiction, is impossible, a violation of the principles of logic amounts to nonsense. Therefore, we take logic to be the only language our reality has been composed of. It is from the *sunnah* i.e., the operational habit of God (or from the nature of God). For a Muslim, anything unreasonable amounts to be false as the truth can only be accessed intellectually through the pathways of correct reasoning. The correct working of reason and sincere faith of the heart are bound to function in coordination towards seeking the truth because reason, the heart, and the truth all share the same Creator.

In Islam, belief in the unseen cannot be against reason nor can the object of trust be logically impossible. Carrying beliefs based on counter-intuitive reasoning or without evidence is against Islamic teachings. The Qur'ān criticizes holding logically incoherent beliefs. Therefore, faith in Islam cannot be baseless or illogical but has to be reasonable due to the source-sharing relation of truth, reason, and the heart—all three being the creations of the same Creator. If reason leads to a conclusion that stands in contradiction to the object of faith, it would amount to believing that God (the shared Creator) commands the use of two distinct faculties simultaneously (to know Him) when both reach mutually exclusive results.

God's existence has been a topic of debate since the beginning of philosophy, whether it be Aristotle's (d. 322 BCE) prime mover argument or Ibn Sīnā's (d. 1037 CE) contingency argument for a necessary existence. However, none of the logical arguments has helped give the debate a satisfactory closure in favour of theists or atheists. This is because atheists expect a conclusion from these arguments that is beyond their scope. Moreover, the operational nature of the arguments for the existence of the Creator cannot convince atheists due to their inconsistently radical sceptic attitude.

The key to the issue lies in correcting the misunderstanding of the purpose of arguments for a necessary existence in the Islamic paradigm. We know how all the logical lines of reasoning adopted by Muslim

²² Faraz A. Khan, trans., *An Introduction to Islamic Theology: Imam Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī's al-Bidāyah fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Berkeley, CA: Zaytuna College, 2020), 336-40.

theologians or the thinkers of other faiths have faced perpetual critiques and rebuttals from atheists. The *kalām* cosmological argument²³ formatted by the twelfth-century Muslim theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī to prove the existence of God through the temporality of occurrences at best proves a “cause” for the “maybe originated” universe. The argument from fine-tuning does not logically necessitate God but simply amazes the human mind to wonder at the miraculously minuscule probability of our existence. Although Anselm’s (d. 1109 CE) ontological argument seems to be a work of a priori deduction, it is nothing more than sophistic intellectual jugglery because it does not inform us how conscious life emerged. Similarly, “God of the gaps” is a logical fallacy. Moreover, the problem of objective morality only demonstrates the utterly chaotic consequences of subjective morality but it does not prove God being the only objective moral standard. Finally, the argument based on contingency proves only a logically necessary existence but there is no proof that this existence is necessarily God.

Such critiques of all the major arguments for the existence of God hold some rational weight and validity if it is assumed that the objective of all the arguments is to “logically prove God” because any arguments that fall short in necessitating the existence of a “personal God” with all His attributes, including revelation, solely through the workings of logic, would be an unsuccessful venture. If the arguer has aimed to prove God through logical arguments and only succeeded in achieving a prime moving force or a necessary existence through syllogism, they have failed to accomplish their aim. This is a critique from within the Islamic tradition against these arguments. The South Asian thinker, Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) scrutinized all such syllogistic proofs to be insufficient in demonstrating the complete logical necessity of the existence of a fully transcendent yet deeply personally involved Being.²⁴

As noted previously, the second claim was about the *āyahs*. The purpose of a sign, as we have explained above, is to suggest meaning rather than “logically” restrict a precise meaning as “the only possible explanation.” Everything in creation that can refer to the presence of an unobservable Creator acts as a sign of God and every argument built through those signs is consequently a sign of the existence of a Creator. All the rational arguments that include procedures and laws of the universe (which act as signs of God) behave as intellectual references to

²³ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1994).

²⁴ Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Karachi: ILQA Publications, 2019), 34-37.

a Creator, making the rational arguments for God too, among the signs of God. Thus, Islamic theology turns rational arguments into rational signs of God. This intricate variance defines the nature of rational arguments in Islamic epistemology. The purpose of reason, then, becomes not to be that of a faculty responsible for conclusively proving the existence of God through syllogistic deduction. Rather, reason is an ability which properly works out the indications of signs in creation and helps the heart aim at reasonable faith. To completely *prove* the existence of God through these signs is not possible, because rational arguments can only act as signs of God and not as conclusive evidence of His existence. Considering claim one, God and His ultimate reality are unobservable in relation to our five senses, physical instruments, and even rational judgements. This is because reason too is an epistemological tool, the function of which is to observe and imagine. Thus, it is understandable that the question of the existence of God (i.e., a complete understanding of God with all His attributes) is a matter of *ghayb* with respect to the capacities of reason correspondingly, implying reason's inherent inability to logically prove the existence of God in His complete nature (as presented in revealed scriptures).

If reason had possessed the authority to syllogistically deduce the existence of God not simply as a Creator or a Sustainer but in His absolute nature (with attributes like love and mercy), He would have become a fully fathomable existence under the limits of reason. But this goes against the nature of God in Islam. In Islam, God is an unfathomable entity (i.e., all attributes of God as well as His existence are unfathomable in their true essence). Thus, reason cannot be held responsible for a task that is beyond its competence. To judge the arguments for the existence of God through Islamic epistemology would help one reach the verdict that each of these arguments only proves what they themselves conclude. In Islamic theology, they are unable to logically necessitate an intellectually unfathomable Being. They only point to various aspects through which one can logically arrive at the requirement for some features of God's existence (independence, eternity, power, volition) to explain everything. However, having registered reason's incapability under Islamic epistemology to logically necessitate God's being, one cannot still turn a blind eye to the acceptance of rational arguments as signs of God. Once understood as signs of God, acting to suggest His existence and attributes rather than logically proving Him, all such rational cases for His existence gain efficient meaning, highlighting the radical sceptic interaction of atheists with these arguments (i.e., signs). Any person capable of identifying the meaning of the word "sign" would be familiar with the fact that signs merely hint at an idea rather than

logically necessitating it. Therefore, any sane individual would not complain about signs lacking an absolutely binding epistemic nature. Having experienced the systems of nature, being familiar with the workings of the structure of our reality, accepting the laws of nature and reason and yet displaying a counter-intuitive line of reasoning to doubt all the laws and rationally accepted notions about the reality simply for the question of God's existence can be termed as disoriented uncertainty. Rejecting based on logic an idea that does not claim to have a logically necessary conclusion is not rational. Demanding extraordinary proof for merely one singled-out query in one's life (the question of God in this case) is nothing more than partial scepticism.

The partiality among atheists is evident when such behaviour is not observed among them if morality is the subject of discussion. The notion of things being self-evident quickly dominates debates of this kind and the idea of acceptance of foundational assumptions about reality receives credibility. Moreover, acknowledgement of foundational scientific assumptions about reality, such as the inductive nature of the world, laws of causality, or comprehensibility of the laws, is never made a subject of partial sceptic criticism. The philosophy of science is rooted in ideas and understandings that cannot be demonstrated through any additional proof, yet are accepted as self-evidentiary. However, self-evidentiary ideas are pushed aside arbitrarily when it comes to the existence of God. Suddenly, the densely overlapping signals from the observance of design in nature, the miraculously precise tuning of the universal constants, the intuitive logical deduction of the need for a necessary being to account for everything that exists, the innate urge to believe in a Creator, the intuitive and rational need for an objective moral standard, the cluelessness of the hard problem of consciousness, the emergence of life, and the fulfilled prophecies made by a Prophet who came with an inimitable linguistic miracle (i.e., the Qur'ān), all become meaningless and merely coincidental "signs" because they do not fulfil the demand of logically necessitating God through logically irrefutable syllogisms, a demand that inherently ignores the nature of God, His message, and the epistemological worth of syllogism in relation to that message. Arguments which are looked at with credibility and epistemic worth in everyday life and even scientific discourse are stripped of any epistemic merit simply to veil oneself from the consideration of the obvious rational validity of belief in God. Moreover, an idea being logically irrefutable is not enough epistemological evidence to accept it as the truth, as truth and accessing truth includes all the epistemic modes of humans working co-ordinately at different playing fields rather than reason alone.

The above discussion supports the Qur'ānic claim that faith (*īmān*) is a matter of heart (*qalb*). No amount of rational proof is sufficient for an insincere seeker, as God says that even if disbelievers were to be granted their demanded signs for the existence of God, their arrogantly ignorant hearts would not obtain the light of faith (*īmān*) and a vision of heavenly angels would still be unsatisfactory for a person who views everything from the sight of disingenuity and interprets the vision through reason governed by their lower desires. Allah explicitly states how a dishonest seeker would turn a blind eye to signs that are convincing according to their own standards.

The limitation of reason in proving unquestionably the Qur'ānic concept of God has been explained alongside reasonably valid inference (to the best explanation) from the world around about a necessary independent Creator through that same reason. Nonetheless, the inherent incapability of reason in perceiving God still needs an intra-Islam contextual explanation. Why has reason been designed, according to Islamic theology, with limitations in logically grasping and proving God by itself? Is there a normative justification for this designed limitation of human intellectual epistemology under Islam's overall objective? This can be discussed with the introduction of our third and final claim of Islamic theology relevant to this thesis.

Human Epistemology through the Test of Faith

Reason serves the purpose, under the Islamic worldview, of contemplating and interpreting the operations of the physical world around us. It would not be a stretch to claim reason's superiority and command over the workings of the physical world. However, as pointed out above, reason has some limitations in inferring the existence of the immaterial transcendental Being from the contingently material world.

The Qur'ānic Claim

The Qur'ān says,

Had We sent down to you, [O Prophet] a revelation in writing and they were to touch it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still have said, "This is nothing but pure magic!" They say, "Why has no [visible] angel come with him?" Had We sent down an angel, the matter would have certainly been settled [at once], and they would have never been given more time [to repent]. And if We had sent an angel, We would have certainly made it [assume the form of] a man—leaving them more confused than they already are.²⁵

²⁵ Qur'ān 6:7-9.

These verses were revealed about Meccan disbelievers who asked the Prophet for a vision of four angels descending from heaven with revelations of God in their hands. This is an extraordinary demand for supernatural miraculous proof, which Allah presents in verse seven as frivolous, insincere, and devoid of any rational honesty. Verses eight and nine then proceed to convey quite a lot about the “proof” and the dynamic of test and trust in Islamic theology, hence they act as the key to our case.

If an angel had descended in its true form right in front of humans for them to witness plainly, “the matter would have certainly been settled at once and they would have been given no time to repent.” But what does it exactly mean for the matter to be settled? Referring to the first claim, arguably the most integral pillar of Islam as a religion is faith (*īmān*) in the unseen (*ghayb*) i.e., trust in the unobservable reality as described by the Qur’ān. This precise concept is alluded to in this verse. Experiencing the sight of an unveiled angel (from the realities of *ghayb*) would eliminate the need for faith for a person, as the very unseen reality they were commanded to have trust in would be unveiled to them, requiring no need for faith, due to the completely evidential and indisputable first-hand experience of the (then) *ghayb*.

If the unseen is seen, the test of putting trust in the unobservable would end. The denial in this situation would lead to the most grievous of punishments (due to arrogant hyper-radicalism since the doubt of being honestly ignorant too would be removed in such a case). Moreover, the acceptance of the absolutely evident would in such a scenario carry no value (as the acceptance had to be through reasonable faith rather than undeniable rational proof). Highlighting the objective of our existence, that is, the objective of the trial of faith—humans being under a divine test—is an intra-Islamic reality that has been explained as a divine plan in many Prophetic narrations²⁶ and Qur’ānic verses.²⁷ Humans have been sent to this world to worship Allah and put faith in the unseen realities, which although unobservable affect directly our ways of living and thus conduct our entire lives through having faith in the validity of the unseen is our trial of faith. A test is defined as a designed trial conducted to examine certain qualities of the involved participants without the participants having access to the actual solutions of the trial. Providing the participants with answers before their efforts would act as a nullification of the meaning of the test as a

²⁶ For example, see Muḥammad b. Yazīd b. Mājāh, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-fitan, Bāb al-ṣabr ‘alā ‘l-balā’, Book 36, No. 4031, <https://sunnah.com/ibnmajah:4031>.

²⁷ For example, see Qur’ān 29:2-3, 2:155-57, 3:142.

process. Allah's removing the veils of the unseen for a person would likewise be equal to providing them with the ultimate answer. The absolute evidence that we know would certainly end the faith-test dynamic.

Therefore, to uphold the purpose of the Islamic worldview of life being a test and allowing the disbelievers time and space to trust the unobservable, Allah brings up a scenario in verse nine that reiterates the objective of the faith-test dynamic. Even if an angel were to be sent down to earth, it would be done so in a method that would not violate the veils of the unseen, would not establish undeniable proof by removing the space for faith, and would not turn the unobservable reality noticeable through any epistemological tool, eventually deliberately not ending the (forced) confusion of the disbelievers during a test environment.

This verse confirms the idea of the designed limitation of human epistemology under the faith-test dynamic in Islam. Humans, by the purpose of their divine duty, possess restricted access to the realities of the world around them. Extending the claims and effects of these verses to our faculty of reason and the arguments for the existence of God would help unfold an even clearer picture of reason's job in this faith-test dynamic.

The Angel of Logic (Reason's Reach Justified)

Allah rejected the demand of an undeniably miraculous proof of revealing His book by sending an angel in its full glory, consequently disclosing the realities of *ghayb* because such a plain sight of an angel, in this case, would act as a logically undoubtable (in its strictest sense) evidence for the truth of Allah's reality. God's unwillingness to allow humans such a specimen of evidence to maintain the test of trust implies a designed limitation or a controlled epistemology of human beings. This rule applies to every information-consuming component of humans. According to this principle, every faculty would have a restriction of not being able to perceive the *ghayb* to keep the *ghayb* truly unobservable to all human senses like the angels are to sight.

Since an angel from the *ghayb* cannot be "seen" plainly by the eye (an epistemological organ) as it would act as a nullifier of the faith-test dynamic, for the reason mentioned by God Himself in the Qur'ān, a logically indisputable argument for the existence of God cannot be produced by reason under the same line of reasoning. An angel's invisibility to the sight here translates to God's unobservability to every epistemological tool of mankind. Reason cannot absolutely prove God's

being as that would act as undeniable proof for mankind (with correctly working cognitive facilities) hence playing the role of an “angel for reason.” An answer reached through logically-binding premises and conclusions is as much (if not more) proof to reason as the sight of an angel is to the eye. Sight can be doubted by an insanely radical mind. However, the result of a sound and valid logical deduction gifts a level of certainty impossible to deny. Any argument for the existence of God “will not be able” to present His being as rationally undeniable under the framework of Islamic epistemology to uphold the trial of trust in a truly unobservable God. Access to *ghayb* through syllogism and principles of logic that are universally intuitive/unquestionable would act as “personal undeniable angels” for every human being, leaving no room for doubt or faith. For now, everyone would have a proof for the divine, a proof equivalent to witnessing an angel by sight. All of this gives meaning to the idea of the designed limitation of reason in accessing the *ghayb* in Islam. Under the framework of Islamic theology, reason will not in any way undeniably prove the existence of God with all His attributes and revelation.

Under the Islamic worldview, a gap has to remain between the logical conclusions reached by the *‘aql* on its own and the truth of God’s actual being, necessarily keeping an area for a leap of faith. Regardless of how close a human gets to proving the being of God through reason, under Islamic epistemology, they would always have to take a leap of faith at some stage to accept a complete understanding of God’s being. Whether a person takes an extended leap of faith in God with zero reasonable proof for God’s existence or takes a short leap of trust from the point of reaching a creating, necessary, eternal and volitional being through reason, under the coherence of Islamic claims and their externally justified explanations, the leap of trust is necessary in Islamic epistemology regarding the question of divine presence.

Lastly, for someone to accept reason’s capacity in logically necessitating a complete Islamic understanding of God, they would have to violate the foundational faith-test dynamic of Islam. Since this dynamic is claimed by the Qur’ān itself, it automatically implies a necessity of faith and an acceptance of a designed limitation of human epistemology for a Muslim.

Conclusion

Islam requires one to have trust in a reality unobservable to human senses/contemplating faculties, a trust that is based on signs that coordinately point towards the reasonability of the existence of an unseen reality. In no explicit manner do Islamic sources ever claim a logically

undeniable absolute truth for its creedal requirements. To force a debate between the roles of faith and reason in Islam would assume juxtaposing the two as contrasting epistemological tools, operating independently of each other. This is an unjust supposition. Reasonable faith stands as a core component of Qur'ānic arguments against disbelievers. Hence, in Islamic theology, unreasonable faith is nothing less than a recipe for unbelief (*kufr*). The divine command of faith presupposes epistemological limitations which in no way allow room for illogical and baseless beliefs. The trust-trial dynamic limits the reach of reason but does not make the trusted reality an irrational stance to adhere to.

In this debate, the onus of proof lies with the deniers of the Necessary Being because theism is the default position of humans scientifically and Islamically. The deniers of the existence of God must present the absolute illogicality of theistic trust and the complete logical absoluteness of atheistic claims. Radical scepticism makes one overlook one's own standards of judgement, often forcing the proponents of reason to give the least reasonable ideas precedence over highly probable and intuitively reasonable ones based on foundational truths of human epistemology.

Although reason justifies faith in God, Islamic epistemology normatively views faith primarily as a matter of a reflective heart rather than reason. Intellectual discourse and rational abilities would never necessarily be directly proportional to the excellence of *īmān* and piety. Faith and its effects on a person depend more on their sincerity and actions than their rational faculties in Islam.²⁸ Complete comprehensibility of the argument from contingency in no way would guarantee an increase in spiritual proximity to Allah. Sincere actions and efforts to seek the truth while striving to become better as a person, however, would secure growth in *īmān*.

The concept of a reflective heart was necessary under this discussion of the necessity of faith and the designed limitation of reason in Islam to display the normative and original viewpoint of Islam on the structure of *īmān*, *'aql*, and *qalb*. This sheds light on Islam's inherent answer to many of the arguments thrown at its adherents in later times. This concept verifies the fact that Muslims are not projecting ideas backwards on Islam due to the questions raised by later atheists. Nobody is trying to forcefully interpret Islamic sources as disregarding reason due to our disability in proving God through reason. Muslims are not filling a gap in their sources regarding the question of the existence of God. There is no such gap in Islamic theology; the so-called gap of

²⁸ Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, 2012), No. 13047.

reason's inability to absolutely prove the existence of God is a question addressed by the Islamic sources themselves. Muslim thinkers of the past were fully aware of the limitations of reason even before they encountered rational arguments against the existence of God. Therefore, it was not their inability to prove the existence of God through logic that led them to construct a doctrine of faith based on something other than reason.

Every argument to date falls short in logically necessitating the complete being of God, proving (undeniably) an attribute of God such as those of independence, eternality, creation, designing, and volition. However, the knowledge of God's being in totality as provided by the revelation is a job beyond the capacity of reason by design, an idea claimed by the primary sources of Islam. Islam's central principles revolve around the understanding of life being a trial of putting trust in an unobservable reality and allowing humans some space to have faith in the unseen that must remain unobservable enough to not act as logically binding proof.

Accordingly, an atheist's assertion that "all the major arguments for God are insufficient" needs to be answered by accepting that the inability of reason to necessitate the knowledge of God is a case for the validity of the Islamic worldview. A gap must remain between the reason's syllogistic result about God and scripture's claims about the unseen God, as this gap is what makes the demand for faith in Islam meaningful. Reason's restricted reach is a normatively claimed Islamic idea that is completely justified under Islamic principles of the faith-test and unseen. Allah demands faith from His creation, and if reason irrefutably proves His existence, the demand for trust in the *ghayb* will turn meaningless.

Radical atheists cannot use reason's inability to logically necessitate God's existence as proof of His non-existence due to reason's restrictions being a truth purposefully affirmed by God Himself as a necessary teleology for Islam's overall intended demand of trusting the unobservable. Nor can the radical sceptics question the ability of God's claimed signs in creation to prove His existence, because the precise usage of the word *āyah* in the Qur'ān never gives the impression of absolute proof, but only hints and points which once again complements Islam's key faith-test dynamic. Neither can they refer to the theistic position as irrational due to the clear reasonability and justification for putting trust in an unseen God, especially when their own positions violate the fundamental laws of logic and human epistemology.

All one needs is a proper understanding of Islamic epistemology (reason-reflective heart), message (faith and test), and theology (unseen-

signs-transcendence) to recognize the misunderstood and miscalculated nature of all the arguments against the Islamic lines of reasoning for Allah's nature and revelation.

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